

**Agency: Commerce, Community and Economic Development****Grants to Named Recipients (AS 37.05.316)****Grant Recipient: Fairbanks Soil & Water Conservation District****Federal Tax ID: 92-0120006****Project Title:****Project Type:** Planning and Research

# Alaska Association of Conservation Districts - Fairbanks Soil & Water Conservation District Invasive Weeds Project

**State Funding Requested: \$70,000**  
 Future Funding May Be Requested

**House District:** Fairbanks Areawide (7-11)**Brief Project Description:**

Prevention Program for Invasive Weeds

**Funding Plan:**

Total Project Cost:	\$350,000
Funding Already Secured:	(\$10,000)
FY2013 State Funding Request:	(\$70,000)
Project Deficit:	\$270,000

*Funding Details:*

FY 12 \$10,000

**Detailed Project Description and Justification:**

Elodea canadensis was discovered in the Chena Slough in August of 2010. It is estimated that the invasive weed has been present for five to seven years. Elodea can "fill up" slow-moving waterways with dense growths of plant material. The dense plant material can make fishing problematic or impossible. Invasion by Elodea has been shown to negatively impact salmon spawning habitat. It's likely that Elodea will also degrade the habitat of the grayling in the slough. Chena Slough is considered one of the best spawning areas for Grayling in the State. Along with the Chena Slough, Elodea has been found in the Chena River, and Chena Lakes, and if not taken care of it could move downstream into the Yukon River drainage.

**Project Timeline:**

Acquire funding FY 13	Summer 2012
Ongoing activity	Summer 2012 - 2017

**Entity Responsible for the Ongoing Operation and Maintenance of this Project:**

Fairbanks Soil &amp; Water Conservation District

**Grant Recipient Contact Information:**

Name:	Joni Scharfenberg
Title:	Coordinator at FSWCD
Address:	590 University Avenue Fairbanks, Alaska 99709
Phone Number:	(907)479-1213
Email:	jonisc@gmail.com

Has this project been through a public review process at the local level and is it a community priority? ☒ Yes ☐ No

## Infestation of invasive aquatic plant discovered in interior Alaska

Meeting planned for December 3<sup>rd</sup>

In late August 2010, our office became aware of a substantial infestation of an invasive aquatic plant *Elodea canadensis*, in the Fairbanks area. Over the last 6 weeks, we have been searching the literature on this species, and corresponding with people who have studied it. While there is still a lot we don't know about this infestation and this species, here are some of the things we've learned.

The species is known as "common waterweed," "Canadian waterweed," or *Elodea canadensis*. It is native to southern Canada and the eastern US. It is not native to Alaska. This species has invaded most of northern Europe, and has spread all the way across Russia to Lake Baikal. It has invaded slow-moving stream systems in New Zealand, and is a major problem in irrigation canals in Australia. This species was originally transported to all these locations as an aquatic ornamental or as an aquarium plant. It spreads in two ways: by breaking up and re-rooting after it is washed downstream or by being carried to new water bodies inadvertently by people, e.g. caught in boat trailers.

It is well-documented that *Elodea* can "fill up" waterways with dense growths of plant material. In other places around the world that it has invaded, *Elodea* has dramatically impeded the navigability of slow-moving waters and of lakes (see photo below). The dense plant material can make fishing problematic or impossible. Invasion by *Elodea* has been shown to negatively impact salmon spawning

habitat. When *Elodea* and other aquatic plants invaded a Chinook spawning area of a river in northern California, both water velocities and spawning activity declined dramatically.

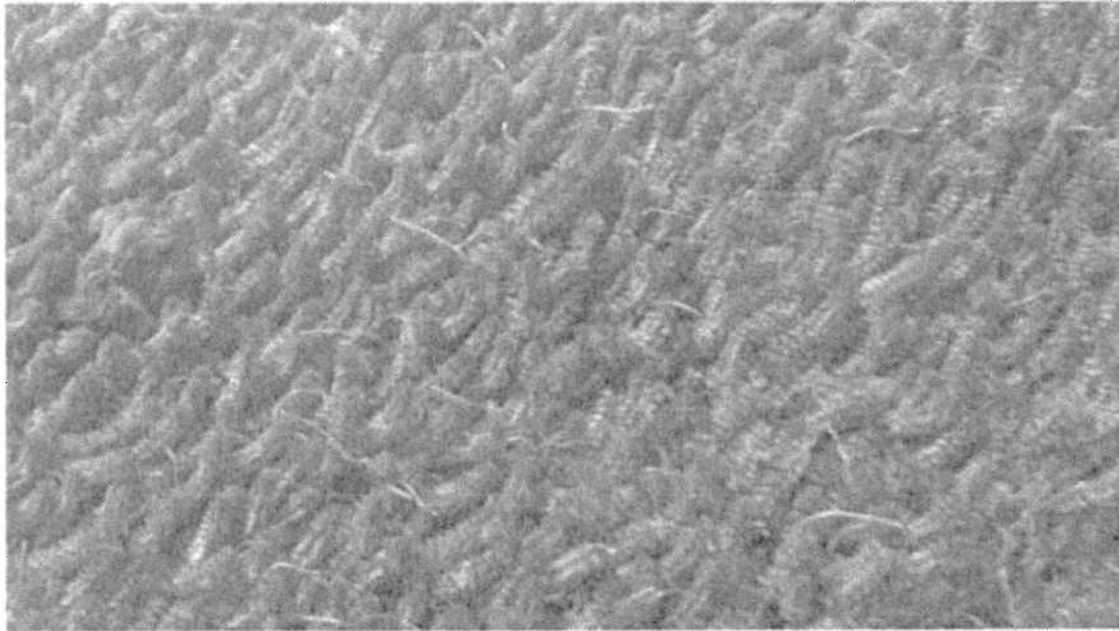


*Elodea canadensis* infestation in a bay of Lake Baikal, Russia.  
Photo: N. Pronin.

As best we can tell at this point, the infestation in the Fairbanks area began in Chena Slough, a tributary of the Chena River. Dense patches of *Elodea* extend for over a mile of Chena Slough, sometimes almost filling the slough basin (see photos next page). And more importantly, *Elodea* has been found in the Chena River, both floating freely and growing attached to river

bottom sediments in several places. Unfortunately, we were not able to thoroughly survey the lower Chena River before freeze-up.

It's likely that *Elodea* was introduced to Chena Slough by someone dumping an aquarium. We believe the infestation in the slough has developed within the last 5 to 10 years; if that's correct, then this species is capable of colonizing waterways here quickly, as it has in northern Europe and Eurasia. If *Elodea* continues to spread in interior Alaska, it could have significant negative impacts on slow-moving stream and river systems, and on many interior lakes.



A dense bed of *Elodea* growing in Chena Slough. In this area the plant material was several feet thick, extended from the slough bottom up to within a few inches of the water surface.

Photo: T. Wurtz

We have organized a meeting to discuss this situation with land managers, biologists, and agency representatives. You or a representative of your group is invited and encouraged to attend. We'll share what we have learned about this species, what we know about its extent here, and begin a discussion of what might be done to keep it from spreading further in the river system or being unintentionally spread overland to new locations. We hope to work as a group to develop a preliminary action plan.

The meeting will be held at the Alaska DNR building (across from Fred Meyers West), in the large conference room, on Friday, December 3<sup>rd</sup>, from 10 am – noon.

For more information, please contact:  
 Tricia L. Wurtz  
 Invasive Plant Program Coordinator  
 USDA Forest Service, Forest Health Protection  
 907-451-2799  
 twurtz@fs.fed.us



A paddlefull of *Elodea* scooped from Chena Slough in August, 2010. Photo: T. Wurtz

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# The Cost of No Action

What would **not doing anything** about the infestation of an invasive aquatic plant in the Fairbanks area cost Alaska?

T. Wurtz and N. Lisuzzo, US Forest Service, Alaska Region, 1/27/2011

In late August 2010, a significant infestation of an invasive aquatic plant, *Elodea canadensis*, was discovered in the Fairbanks area. This is the first time an invasive aquatic plant has been found in Alaska.

*Elodea canadensis* has a long and well-documented history as an invasive species. It was originally introduced to Scotland and Great Britain more than a century ago, as an aquatic ornamental. Since then, it spread throughout the British Isles, much of Scandinavia and all the way across Russia to Lake Baikal, crossing two continental divides along the way. It grows aggressively in slow-moving waters and lakes. It grows well in cold climates, surviving the winters under lake and river ice. Once introduced to a new area, it spreads in two ways: by breaking up and re-rooting after it is washed downstream, or by being carried to new waterbodies inadvertently by people, e.g. caught in boat trailers or on float plane floats.

*Elodea* can “fill up” slow-moving waterways with dense growths of plant material. In other places around the world that it has invaded, *Elodea* has dramatically impeded the navigability of slow-moving waters and of lakes<sup>1</sup>. The dense plant material can make fishing problematic or impossible. Invasion by *Elodea* has been shown to negatively impact salmon spawning habitat<sup>2</sup>. When *Elodea* and other aquatic plants colonized a Chinook spawning area of a river in northern California, both water velocities and spawning activity declined rapidly and dramatically. It's likely that *Elodea* also degrades the habitat of other species of sport fish.

*Elodea canadensis* has dramatically impacted lakes in England. “...Over here, an infestation can and does make fishing impossible. Rowing boats can't row, jet skis can get blocked and speed boats have problems as well.”

Mike Stretton, Aquatic Solutions UK



“...we can easily remove 20+ tons to the acre (of *Elodea canadensis*) from the water.” - Mike Stretton, Aquatic Solutions UK

At present, the *Elodea* infestation in interior Alaska appears to be confined primarily to a slow-moving stream called Chena Slough. But individual plants and small patches were observed in the Chena River itself just prior to freeze-up in fall, 2010. Our best estimate is that this infestation is very recent; it likely has been developing for only five to seven years.

If Alaskans don't respond to the *Elodea* infestation in Chena Slough, it will spread. It could spread via flowing water to any point downstream of the mouth of the slough. Fast-flowing river systems, or those carrying silt, are unlikely to be colonized, but will still serve to spread plant propagules. In time, it could colonize slow-moving reaches of the Chena, and sloughs and oxbows of the Tanana and Yukon drainages. If unchecked, it could colonize the mouths of slow-moving rivers that empty into the lower Yukon. It could be spread by float planes and boats to lakes all over the state, from Homer to the North Slope. Once *Elodea* becomes widely dispersed in Alaska, there will be nothing we can do about it.



Brazilian elodea, a related species, in a lake in Oregon. Photo: OR Statesman Journal.



Float plane rudder with aquatic plants. Float planes are one way that *Elodea* may be spread to Alaskan lakes. Photo: D. Lassuy

# What will this cost Alaska?

It is impossible to know precisely how much damage the unchecked spread of *Elodea* could cause in Alaska. But based on what it has done in other places around the world, two industries likely to be affected are sport fishing and commercial salmon harvest. Although it would be very difficult to estimate how much *Elodea canadensis* could cost our state, even a small change that affects either of these industries could result in a substantial economic loss:

## Commercial salmon harvest:

The average annual value of Alaska's commercial salmon harvest is \$230 million.<sup>1</sup>

If potential future habitat degradation from *Elodea* resulted in a reduction in salmon populations by 1/10th of 1%, then

$0.001 * \$230,000,000/\text{yr} = \text{\$230,000/yr future loss in revenues in commercial salmon harvest}$

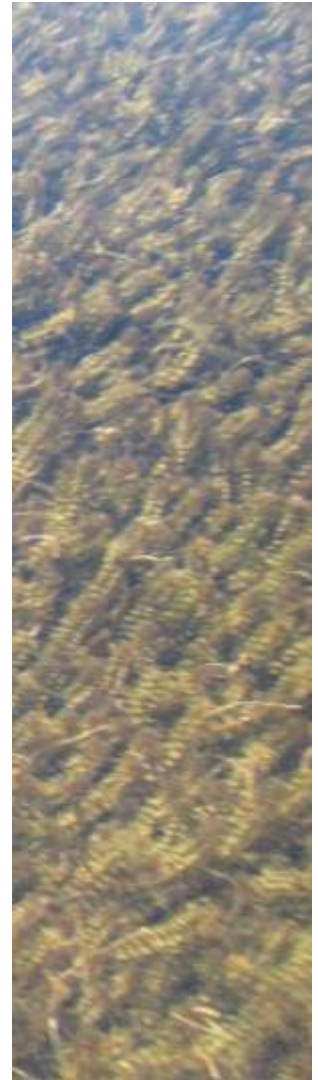
## Sport fishing:

The Alaskan sport fish industry is valued at \$1.4 billion a year, 7% of which (\$98 million) is from Interior Alaska.<sup>2</sup> *Elodea* could colonize the streams and freshwater lakes in some of the prime fishing areas of our state, damaging fish habitat and reducing angling opportunities.

If widespread *Elodea* infestation in Alaska resulted in a future reduction in sport fishing opportunities by 1/10th of 1%, then

$0.001 * 1,400,000,000/\text{yr} = \text{\$1,400,000/yr future loss in sport fish revenues}$

$0.001 * 98,000,000 = \text{\$98,000/yr future loss in sport fish revenues in interior Alaska alone}$



A dense bed of *Elodea* growing in Chena Slough.

In this area the plant material was several feet thick, extended from the slough bottom up to within a few inches of the water surface.

# What can Alaskans do?

Projects to stop the spread of invasive aquatic plants are going on all over the country. Several successful examples began with situations similar to ours: an *Elodea* infestation in a river system. Alaskans need to mobilize: leadership, initiative, cooperation, funding and fast action are all needed. From the Governor's Office to boy scout troops, everyone's help is needed. Get involved today. Contact Darcy Etcheverry at the Fairbanks Soil and Water Conservation District at [FCWMA.tech@gmail.com](mailto:FCWMA.tech@gmail.com) or visit [http://www.fairbankssoilwater.org/resources\\_Chena\\_Slough\\_Invasive.html](http://www.fairbankssoilwater.org/resources_Chena_Slough_Invasive.html)

<sup>1</sup> Simpson, D.A. 1984. A short history of the introduction and spread of *Elodea Michx* in the British Isles. *Watsonia*, 15:1-9

<sup>2</sup> Merz, J.E., Smith, J.R., Workman, M.L., Setka J.D., and B. Mulchaey. 2008. Aquatic Macrophyte Encroachment in Chinook Salmon Spawning Beds: Lessons Learned from Gravel Enhancement Monitoring in the Lower Mokelumne River, California. *North American Journal of Fisheries Management*. 28: 1568-1577

<sup>3</sup> ADF&G. 2005. Commercial fisheries of Alaska. Special Report 05-09. [www.alaska.gov/adfg](http://www.alaska.gov/adfg)

<sup>4</sup> ADF&G. 2007. Economic impacts and contributions of sportfishing in Alaska. [www.alaska.gov/adfg](http://www.alaska.gov/adfg)

Established Action Committees  
 Chena - *Elodea canadensis*

Steering Committee	Survey	ID Samp. & Proc.	Control	Permits	Funding	Legislation	Research	BMP for Agency Ops	Outreach
Amy Larsen	Alan Batten	Audra Brase	Lisa Beattie	Laura Jacobs	Darcy Etcheverry	Meredith Cameron	Amy Larsen	Audra Brase	Audra Brase
John Haddix	Valerie Baxter	Amy Larsen	Blaine Spellman	Jeff Rogers	John Haddix	John Coghill	Harry Davis	Alan Brackney	Katrina LeMieux
Schar- Joni fenberg	Lisa Beattie	Tim Cater	Laura Jacobs	Christy Everett	Meredith Cameron	Jacob Wilson	Mark Wipfli	Katrina LeMieux	Meghan Murphy
Jessica Beecher	Jessica Beecher	Christy Everett	Bonnie Million	Valerie Baxter	John Coghill	Grier Hopkins		Meghan Murphy	Harry Davis
Etche- Darcy verry	Alan Brackney	Schar- Joni fenberg	Cecil Rich	Andrew Cyr	Harry Davis	Jeff Stepp		Vargas - Delia Kretsinger	Alan Batten
	Audra Brase		Jeff Rogers	Meghan Murphy	Bob Henszey				Lisa Beattie
	Darcy Etcheverry		Trish Wurtz	Brett Nelson	Denny Lassuy				Ryan Binkley
	Jessica Guritz		Christy Everett	AJ Wait	Mitch Osborne				Todd Boyce
	Amy Larsen				Jacob Wilson				Mike Cox
	Katrina LeMieux				Gary Wilken				Andrew Cyr
	Jeff Mason								Nancy DeWitt
	Ryan Binkley								James Doogan
									Etch-
	John Haddix								Darcy everry
	Christy Everett								Jessica Guritz
	Nancy DeWitt								John Immel
	Blaine Spellman								Jeff Mason
									Michelle Roberts
									Jeff Rogers
									Schar- Joni fenberg

## *Elodea canadensis* – Stakeholders Meeting

10am – 12:30 December 3, 2010

Fairbanks DNR Office

Minutes

### **In Attendance:** (please see attendee list online)

Welcome, brief introductions. Trish Wurtz, USFS Forest Health Protection

### **Presentations:** (please see presentations online)

#### ***Elodea canadensis: an unexpected visitor to Alaska* - Amy Larsen, National Park Service**

Overview of the plant's history in Alaska and a description of the known infestations in Chena Slough and Chena River.

#### ***Impacts of *E. canadensis* on aquatic ecosystems around the world* - Nick Lisuzzo, USFS Forest Health Protection**

Description of the plant's invasive history in other parts of the world. General costs associated with controlling the plant vs. no action.

#### ***A brief history of Chena Slough* - Bob Henszey, US Fish & Wildlife Service**

History of the Chena Slough based on development and the creation of the Moose Creek dam. Overview of options for increasing flow of the Chena Slough.

#### ***Overview of methods for controlling invasive aquatic plants* - Trish Wurtz, USFS Forest Health Protection**

Aquatic weed control is common in the Lower 48. Case study of Brazilian waterweed control on the Chehalis River.

### **Questions & Conversation:**

Q: How long is it viable out of water? A: Unknown

Q: Does it die back in the winter? A: It can be active under the ice

Q: Has it been found in the Tanana? A: No, and it probably will not survive in silty water. Need more survey data.

Q: Could jet boats spread the plant? A: Yes, it could be sucked up, broken into smaller pieces, and spread.

Q: Will this be a problem for fish habitat? A: Yes, it directly competes with redd habitat.

Q: Could this plant grow in Birch and Harding Lake? A: Probably, if the water is clear, the temperature is in the right range, and there is low current.

Q: How can we prevent it from spreading? A: Options are education (signs, PSA's, training) and regulation. Denny Lassuy mentioned the aquatic hitchhikers website has great info on reducing spread (<http://www.protectyourwaters.net/>)

Q: What are the chances that it will survive on canoes and paddles? A: It can withstand some drying, but research will have to be done before we can tell people exactly what precautions to take.

Q: What is the plan for further surveys? A: There is no current plan, which is the point of this meeting! It would be great to tie the survey data into AKEPIC

Q: Has there been talk of federal regulations? A: In 10 states it is illegal to import this plant

Q: Has it been eradicated from Eyak Lake, where it was found 30 years ago? A: It was found initially during a survey with a grappling hook. The lake is remote, so when we called down there no one could tell us what the status of the plant is.

Q: Do we have a contact at UAF? Can they help with the problem? A: Trish mentioned that Mark Wipfli from fisheries would like to help with research.

Q: Is anyone from FNSB lands involved? A: Mike Cox, FNSB parks & rec, said Paul Costello would be the person to talk to.

Q: Is *Elodea Canadensis* available over the counter in Fairbanks? A: It was not found in Fishtopia or Petsmart recently, but Brazilian waterweed was being sold in Petsmart in September.

Q: There is a landowner on the slough that is planning on dredging part of the channel. At the time the project was designed, it was not known this was an invasive plant. Their plan is to put the dredged vegetation in straw wattles and leave them on the bank. Would that be a problem? A: They should be careful about fragmentation of the plant, which will cause it to spread. Clearing 1 section of the slough will only help for 1 summer, and then the plant will move in again.

Chena Slough Technical Committee: Christy Everett explained that the group was formed with the goals to improve fish habitat and water flow while maintaining the trail system of the slough that is used year-round by canoers, snowmachiners, etc. Christy believes that the Chena Slough will be an opportune area to pilot control studies of *Elodea Canadensis* because it has extensive road access, interested landowners, and seems to have optimal habitat conditions for the plant's growth. Joni Scharfenberg mentioned that 5-6 years ago plant specimens were collected from overgrown areas of the slough and brought to biologists. No invasive plants were ever identified from those samples.

It was mentioned by one attendee that the State of Alaska has a weed cutting barge that is used on a lake to cut up lily pads so that float planes can land.

### **Round Robin – Where to go from here?:**

What can you, or your agency, provide to this project?

Brett Nelson, DOT & PF: help with DOT permitting. There is a culvert replacement project happening on Chena Slough in 2011. After this project there will be 2 culverts left to replace, but more funding is needed. Brett is involved in CNIPM, and can keep that group informed.

Mike Cox, FNSB Parks & Rec: Mike manages boat launches, so could assist with signage at their facilities.

Meredith Cameron, Representative Guttenberg: Can be involved with possible funding and legislation.

Jessica Guritz, Fairbanks SWCD: Jessica is a member of the Fairbanks Cooperative Weed Management Area, which could be a big help with survey work and outreach.

Todd Boyce, FNSB Planning: Will keep the Borough planning department involved. Todd has been involved with culvert replacement on Chena Slough and sees that this invasive plant might wipe out all the benefits from those culverts.

Josh Buzby, Ft. Wainwright natural resources: Josh is not sure how this invasive plant could impact training, so unsure how he can be involved except as a concerned citizen.

Jeff Mason, *US Army (Ft. Greely) & Colorado State University*: Jeff will keep watch for the plant in the Delta area. He thinks he may have seen it before in the Delta Clearwater, but Amy said Dave Dom checked the Clearwater this year and it was not found. Jeff mentioned that we should keep in mind waterfowl may spread the plant.

Marie Heidemann, *UAF graduate student*: She will be moving home to Juneau in a week, but think UAF should be involved. Grad students are inexpensive research assistants!

Grier Hopkins, *Senator Thomas*: Craig Johnson introduced legislation for an invasive species council. User groups should be called upon to help build support for the legislation. Grier wondered what impacts a bridge over the Tanana might have on spreading the plant.

Jeff Stepp, *Senator Paskvan*: Jeff referred comments to Senator Coghill's expertise.

Christy Everett, *Army Corps of Engineers & Tanana Valley Watershed Association*: Christy explained the situations we would need to get a corps permit – section 10 (navigable) waters, but if we want to dredge only vegetation a corps permit would not be required. Trish wondered is a drawdown of the slough would be possible. Christy noted that Chena Slough is not regulated by the Corps, but by DNR, though a drawdown would probably not be feasible because of groundwater flow. Amy asked if there were Corps funds available for restoration. Christy said yes, through the civil works division, but it is a detailed planning process with strict guidelines. As a TVWA member, the Chena Slough is an emphasis for the group, so would want to participate in survey and control.

Delia Vargas Kretsinger, *US Fish & Wildlife Service – Yukon Flats NWR*: Delia is involved with vegetation surveys on Beaver Creek and other rivers. She is concerned about points of entrance (boats, planes) into the Refuge. One way may be through the ducks that the AK Fire Service uses to scoop water from lakes to dump on fires. The Fire Service can provide GPS points of places they scoop water. Delia will look into FWS practices to make sure they won't be inadvertently spreading the plant.

AJ Wait, *DNR permitting*: The Chena Slough is considered navigable water by DNR. AJ can assist by letting us know if we need a permit for a certain activity and by providing technical guidance of proposed techniques. A conversation ensued about who "owns" the river. AJ says that DNR owns from OHW (ordinary high water) to OHW line, but will probably say in this instance they own from the original (pre-dam) OHW. DNR also "owns" the aquatic plants. AK Dept of Fish & Game manages/monitors activities in fish bearing stream, and they have a statutory, vested interest in doing so.

Blaine Spellman, *AK Association of Conservation Districts*: Blaine works closely with all the SWCD and mentioned that up to now, AACD has been solely focused on terrestrial invasive plants, so this is new to everyone. He may be able to provide use of a youth crew this summer to conduct survey and control work. If the youth crew is funded, we are already planning on surveys of the Chatanika and upper Chena Rivers.

Alan Brackney, *US Fish & Wildlife Service – Arctic NWR*: Alan was a wetland ecologist in the Lower 48, so he knows the plant but if seen in the field in Alaska he probably wouldn't have recognized it as an invasive plant. He would like to help with surveys as a private citizen.

Meghan Murphy, *US Fish & Wildlife Service – Arctic NWR*: Meghan can help with permitting for air transport, as well as education.

John Immel, *Harding Lake Association*: The HLA meets 1x a year in early June. John will take the message back to the group to pass information on to the landowners. He is willing to serve as the contact from Harding Lake.

Gary Wilken, *Harding Lake Association*: He will also take the message back to the President of the Harding Lake Association. 300+ members can be informed about the issue. We should not try to minimize the problem because it seems to be very serious. Gary is willing to help with funding.

Ryan Binkley, *Riverboat Discovery*: The riverboat operates on the last 4 miles of the lower Chena River. The Chena seems to be going through similar low flow problems as the slough. Their business can help by looking for the plant, education, and providing equipment.

Michelle Roberts, *Festival Fairbanks & Chena Riverfront Commission*: The riverfront commission is already working to make landowners aware of how they impact the river. *Elodea canadensis* will now be included in their media campaign. Michelle mentioned that we need to educate people at the point of sale (jet skis, boats, gas stations, fish supply stores, etc.). Nancy added that people need to know "Don't Dump Aquariums!"

Jeff Rogers, *DNR Mining*: Jeff permits hundreds of suction dredgers in Fairbanks, so he suggested that the miners could help dredge the slough (super sucker in "control" presentation) in exchange for a permit fee waiver from DNR for their placer mines. Jeff also mentioned that Boy Scouts should be involved.

Lisa Beattie, *Watershed School*: Lisa has access to inexpensive labor. She thinks there are many ways her students could be involved, such as making outreach posters.

Alan Batten, *Fairbanks Paddlers*: Al would like to be involved in outreach efforts, and may be able to participate in survey.

Tim Cater, *ABR*: Tim could help set up a system to ID collected plant samples. There are several botanists at ABR who could be involved with ID.

Jessica Beecher, *US Fish & Wildlife Service*: Jessica believes there may be funding available through USFWS's Partners program (Mitch Osborne). She also works with a USFWS youth crew in the summer that could help on the project, possibly through survey efforts.

James Doogan, *Quartz Lake property owner*: James noted that Quartz Lake owners are not organized, but are energetic! A survey should be done at Quartz this summer. It was noted the Salcha-Delta SWCD needs to be involved in this process.

Nick Lisuzzo, *US Forest Service*:

Amy Larsen, *National Park Service*: Amy cannot support the project with funding, but is available to spend time and expertise on the project. She would be willing to facilitate research activities and train people on plant ID (put on a seminar?). Personally, she is willing to devote time to the project because she is worried about the impacts this plant could have.

Audra Brase, *AK Dept. of Fish & Game – Sport Fish*: Audra said Fish and Game has no funds to put towards the project, but can support through in-kind use of technicians. Audra and her team can keep an eye out when visiting various lakes and streams this summer. For example, they will be headed to Minto this summer and can do a survey at that time. Their division runs boats all over, and they should be aware of procedures to keep the plant from spreading. The education branch of Sport Fish could be involved in outreach efforts. Fish and Game issues permits – it is possible they could attach an info page about *Elodea* and ask people to take photos and GPS points if seen. Also, Fish & Game has an invasive species coordinator (Tammy Davis) in Juneau.

Laura Jacobs, *AK Dept. of Fish & Game – Habitat*: Habitat division would be the ones to issue permits for control activities in fish bearing waters (chemical application, dredging, basically anything besides hand pulling). The Chena Slough is important to grayling spawning and rearing, as well as Chinook rearing. Laura would be available

to help with any efforts to keep the slough functioning, but her division has no funds to devote, so will have to support through an advisory role and staff time.

Jacob Wilson, *Representative Bob Miller*: Representative Miller may be able to help through funding and legislation. Jacob noted that education of the public is very important. Activism has a snowballing effect, which will put pressure on their office to get things done.

Senator John Coghill: He lives on the Slough and has seen changes over the years. Senator Coghill is appreciative of citizen concern for the slough, which helped to secure funds for culvert replacement. One idea he had was to put signs up on culverts to inform canoers, fisherman, etc. about Elodea and possible control work. The Senator would like to organize a conversation between DNR, Fish & Game, the military, DEC, SWCDs, and other elected officials about what ways we can/can't work together on the issue. He wondered what DEC's role will be, especially with slough concerns of urban shift and sewage flow. Senator Coghill is willing to go to bat for more funding, especially if he can show what the impacts of the plant could be. To develop a strong funding pitch, a statement should be formed on **what is at stake, and what we believe it will cost to remedy the situation**. One issue he mentioned was that private property owners are blocking certain access points to the slough, so there will be even more pressure on bridges for access. The military should be involved because they rent boats that are used all along the river system. Also, Senator Coghill supports the invasive species council legislation.

Harry Davis, *Trout Unlimited*: Nationally, Trout Unlimited is interested in invasive species issues. The group is active in funding restoration projects and research.

Andrew Cyr, *DNR – Lands*: In the realm of permitting, he can help with stipulations on managing equipment and permitting for water activities. The division of parks should be involved with outreach at boat launches. Personally, Andrew would like to help with outreach efforts.

Valerie Baxter, *DNR – Lands*: Valerie can provide support to permitting by identifying vectors of spread and adding stipulations for equipment washing. A 1 page document, showing how to ID the plant, should be handed out to everyone seeking a permit.

John Haddix, *US Army – Ft. Wainwright*: John has funds that may be available for use, but only on military lands. He would like to help with survey efforts and could provide equipment, staff, and possible volunteer support from the Wounded Warriors program.

Bob Henszey, *US Fish & Wildlife*: Bob can provide technical expertise and use of maps.

Darcy Etcheverry, *AK Association of Conservation Districts*: Darcy volunteered to be the point of contact for the project, as to help with committees staying on task. She can set up an Elodea page on the FSWCD website, and she is willing to give presentations to user groups.

Katrina LeMieux, *DOT & PF*: Katrina can be the point of contact for DOT and will inform the design section. She can hand out informational fliers and provide general information to project managers. She would like to be involved in outreach and survey.

Joni Scharfenberg, *Fairbanks SWCD*: Joni is a member of the Chena Slough Technical Committee, as well as the Tanana Valley Watershed Association. The SWCD can provide staff to various projects and meeting rooms if needed.

Denny Lassuy, *US Fish & Wildlife Service (Anchorage)*: Denny works as the USFWS invasive species coordinator. He could provide funding and help with feasibility, contracting, etc. He is pleased to see this level of interest and commitment, and he believes Alaska could move to the forefront of aquatic plant management – just as it has

on terrestrial invasive plants. The Freshwater Plants of Alaska book is online and should be posted to the website.

Cecil Rich, *US Fish & Wildlife (Anchorage)*: Cecil has worked with aquatic invasive plants in the Lower 48, so he has experience with various control options.

#### **Steering Committee:**

After the round robin a steering committee was formed to help guide the process from this point forward.

Darcy Etcheverry, *AK Association of Conservation Districts*

Joni Scharfenberg, *Fairbanks SWCD/Chena Slough Technical Committee*

Jessica Beecher, *US Fish & Wildlife Service*

*Harding Lake Association (will choose a representative at next meeting)*

John Haddix, *US Army – Ft. Wainwright*

Amy Larsen, *National Park Service*

#### **Final thoughts:**

We need to present the problem of *Elodea canadensis* in the Chena River system as a statewide, as well as boroughwide, problem to secure funding. Everyone should think about who we represent and make sure those people are informed about this issue.

**Go TEAM!**



## FAIRBANKS SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

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February 9, 2012

To: House Resources Committee  
From: The Fairbanks Soil & Water Conservation District

Dear Representatives Feige and Seaton,

The Fairbanks Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) appreciates your request for testimony about invasive species management from the State of Alaska. This is one of our primary natural resource focus areas, and we work with numerous partners to accomplish survey, outreach, and control projects. Compared to other states, Alaska has relatively few invasive species and is in a unique position to prevent extensive ecological impacts that can cost millions of dollars in damages to restore.

Unfortunately, in 2010 an aquatic invasive plant, *Elodea nuttallii*, was discovered growing in the Fairbanks area in Chena Slough. *Elodea* has the potential to impact Alaska's freshwater resources by directly competing with native flora. The impacts include degraded fish habitat, displacement of native plants, increased sedimentation, and constriction for fish passage. Aside from the ecological ramifications of an aquatic invasive plant, there are also consequences for recreation and property values in impacted areas.

Since its discovery, Fairbanks SWCD has worked with local and federal partners to coordinate the response effort. In Fairbanks *Elodea* has colonized large portions of the Chena Slough, making the slough nearly impassable in some areas. *Elodea* is also growing in Chena Lake, a popular Borough recreation area, and in isolated locations in the Chena River. If no action is taken, the potential for *Elodea* to move downstream into the Yukon River drainage is great. Utilizing a grant from the Sustainable Salmon Fund, Fairbanks SWCD is funded for *Elodea* outreach and control trials in interior Alaska through December 2012. The 2012 focus will be determining the most appropriate methods for long term control efforts.

However, from surveys conducted in 2011, *Elodea* is currently known to be growing in Anchorage and the Cordova area as well. At the end of 2012 no funds are secured for *Elodea* management in any area of Alaska. A rough estimate of control costs over the next 5 years in the Fairbanks area alone is approximately \$320,000, which covers costs associated with equipment and labor. The Fairbanks SWCD urges the House Resources Committee to continue support for invasive species management in Alaska. It is important that particular species, such as *Elodea*, be controlled before they spread to new locations. The longer we wait to eradicate this plant, the higher the risk of irreparable impacts to freshwater systems and fish habitat.

Sincerely,

Randolf Scharfberg

Chairman, Fairbanks SWCD Board of Supervisors

CC: Interior Alaska Delegation  
Governor's Office

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